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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 006326

SIPDIS

PARIS FOR ZEYA, LONDON FOR TSOU

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#) [HRCS](#)

SUBJECT: SARG HIGHLIGHTS TWO RECENT CLASHES WITH ISLAMISTS

REF: DAM 4824

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4 b/d

[11.](#) (C) Summary: Two Islamist militants were injured in a shoot-out with Syrian security forces the morning of December 4 in Aleppo, according to Syrian media. A previously unreported clash between security forces and militants also occurred in Aleppo a week earlier, leaving two dead and three injured, according to Syria's state-run news agency. In both instances, Syrian media indicated the militants were "takfiris," an Arabic term for those committed to the elimination of infidels for not applying Islamic law. One contact says he believes the clashes are a sign of the SARG's own battle with Islamic militants and its efforts to stem the flow of fighters to Iraq. End summary.

[12.](#) (C) Five people, including two Islamists, were injured in a shoot-out with Syrian anti-terrorism forces at about 1130 December 4 on the road to Aleppo's airport, according to Syrian media. The standoff apparently took place after the militants sneaked away from a nearby location under a month-long Syrian surveillance effort, according to Associated Press correspondent Albert Aji. The militants drove to a vehicle registration center in Aleppo where they planned to set off a bomb to take revenge on Syrian authorities, said Aji, citing a personal source in Aleppo. Security agents prevented the militants from carrying out their plan, according to state media. The militants suffered serious injuries, while two civilians and a member of Syrian security sustained minor injuries, according to the media.

[13.](#) (U) A previously unreported clash between security forces and militants also occurred in Aleppo a week earlier, reportedly leaving two dead and three injured, according to Syria's state-run news agency. Authorities seized a weapons cache after that incident, according to official media. In both instances, Syrian media indicated the militants were "takfiris," an Arabic term for those committed to the elimination of infidels for not applying Islamic law.

[14.](#) (C) According to Aji, the recent clashes indicate the SARG is combating militant Islamists on its territory. He speculated that the militants probably belonged to the Jund al Sham group and were based in the Aleppo area to facilitate the passage of fighters to Iraq. Aji also cited Aleppo's historically strong ties to Islam, including to the Muslim Brotherhood.

[15.](#) (C) Comment: Since the middle of this year, the SARG has publicly highlighted efforts to confront violent Islamist elements (reftel). In view of the continuing pressure on the SARG to cooperate with the Mehlis investigation, the regime may be seeking to signal cooperation in other areas, including in the war against militant Islamist groups.
SECHE